

Reflections on the Christa



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Mary Cross, Director Rev. Sandra Park, Associate Director

EDITOR: Edwina Hunter

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INTRODUCTION

from the Editor

by Dr. Edwina Hunter

"Reflections on the Christa . . .": historical, artistic, theological, priestly, poetic, narrative, educational, photographic, rabbinical, ethnic, pastoral, and personal--very personal. This issue of the Journal of Women and Religion is dedicated to the Christa and to her sculptor, Edwina Sandys. It is dedicated to all those who, with Edwina Sandys, open our eyes and our hearts to the presence of the feminine in the Judeo-Christian tradition and to the power and vulnerability of the Christ within each of us.

The reflections and the photographs which appear in these pages are purposefully ordered. The reader is invited to "begin at the beginning," to dialogue with what is written and what is depicted, to question juxtapositions of articles and photographs, to enter into reflection for yourself, and to write your own response when you have finished. What stories or poems or dreams or images are stirred up for you? Is anything changed for you, or are you changed in any way, because of your encounter with the Christa? You are invited to read this journal as a part of your own spiritual pilgrimage, to walk with us and dance with us as we walk and dance with the Christa. You may find that you dream and suffer as well. That, too, is a part of the pilgrimage.

INTRODUCTION

from the Publisher

by Mary Cross

Religious art carries with it a special standard of value. We judge religious art not by perfection of line or by purely aesthetic excellence, but rather value it through its relationship with a community and the meaning it evokes for people. So when we talk about the value and importance of Christa, we are really talking about a relationship that has grown out of our experience with this remarkable work of art.

Christa was brought to the Bay Area by Stanford University and displayed at Stanford Memorial Chapel from October through December, 1984. At Christa's opening event, Dr. Jo Milgrom (Center for Judaic Studies) and Dr. Edwina Hunter (Pacific School of Religion) were invited to address those gathered regarding the theological significance of Christa. CWR had publicized this event and about two dozen GTU persons were present. The women and men from GTU were challenged and excited by the experience of Christa and the theological issues that surfaced. It might have ended there--an exciting event, a single moving experience--but more was to happen with Christa and CWR.

Early one morning, two days after the Christa event, a CWR staff member found what looked like a CWR newsletter at the GTU reception desk. The sheet carried the CWR logo, as well as the name of our staff member on the lead article. The title emblazoned on the article was "Animalia". Across half the page hung Christa, with a tail carefully drawn on her body. The article was a take-off on our publicity for Christa, but instead of a woman,

an animal was on that cross.

What were we to do? Much of the oppression and persecution of women remains hidden, even to the enlightened. Violence against women shocks us. We keep secret the domestic violence in our own homes. Poverty, underemployment, and lack of education of women is masked in our denial. The social, political, and spiritual repression of women is sometimes so subtle it is almost a sleight of hand. So Christa, like the suffering Christ, was the public object of the bitter hatred that exists against women. At this turn of events, the GTU women and men whose excitement and curiosity had been engaged at Stanford became hurt and angry.

However, a new spirit rose in some people out of the pain of that counterfeit newsletter. Our relationship with Christa deepened. In a new way, the Christa represented women's suffering. We at CWR decided to focus programs for the remainder of the year on the despair and hope that emerge as we face women's oppression. And we began to explore bringing Christa to the GTU campus.

On Easter Monday, the Christa opened for a five month stay at the Badé Museum. Sculptor Edwina Sandys was present to meet the 125 people gathered. Dr. Hunter and Dr. Milgrom spoke to the group about Christa's meaning.

While Christa was on display at the Badé Museum, hundreds visited her. CWR has offered classes and programs centering on Christa and has distributed posters of Christa and Dr. Milgrom's and Dr. Hunter's reflections.

The Christa has created some new working relationships for CWR and member schools, engaged many students and visitors in theological reflection, and kept constantly before us the issues of the meaning of gender and our understanding of God. Our deepening connection to Christa has led to conversation concerning possible acquisition. Sculptor Edwina Sandys believes that CWR and the GTU would be an appropriate setting for Christa. We are raising funds and await news of a possible grant. This issue of the journal shows you some of our experience with Christa. We

hope that your experience with Christa will fill you with the Spirit, as she has empowered us.

Christa:

you are the beautiful embodiment of the universal suffering of humankind.

Just as Jesus was neither male nor female, you also are the personification of the balance of masculine & feminine energies within us.

People don't want to see your image. As long as they can continue to see woman depicted as either (1) mother or (2) sexuality personified -- the suffering of womanhood can be ignored. Christa, you have taken on the suffering of humankind. you are truly the embodiment of Holy Spirit. Thank you for your presence.

Reflections on the Christa

from an Art Historian

by Jo Milgrom

When Christa opened in New York in the spring of 1984, she was greeted with great passion--for some it was passionate joy; for others it was painful dismay. Before we allow ourselves full emotional response, let's address two issues:

What are the theological antecedents to such a sculpture? She was not born fully grown from the forehead of Edwina Sandys. What concepts, what images are part of our western 20th century religious baggage to make such a creation possible? And second, what do we learn from Christa? What are the rewards and hazards of our exposure?

My first response upon hearing about Christa was: it's about time, how come it took so long? You see, I understood her as a feminine aspect of the divine, as there is a feminine aspect to every male (and a masculine aspect to every female).

I'd like to show you in art and in biblical texts how I began to unfold a presentation for this occasion. I said to myself, let's not start with Jesus, the second Adam in Christianity; or with Moses; let's start with Adam, the first human being, remembering that Adam was created in the image of God, establishing that superlative precedent for the rest of us.

While you view Chagall's etching of the angel bringing Adam

to earth [slide]¹, I will refresh your memory of the creation narratives. Genesis 1:27 reads as follows:

God created Adam in His image
In the image of God He created him,
Male and female He created them.

It is a very ambiguous statement. It could be understood that God created humanity; or that he created a separate man and woman, or that he created an androgynous first creature. It is the latter possibility that finds its way into the mythology of Jewish midrash, and is expressed in this lumpy Adam whose masculinity is intentionally compromised by his breasts and curvaceous hips. In an earlier drawing (preparatory to his cubist Homage a Apollinaire of 1913 [slide], Chagall clearly reflects the midrash:

R. Samuel b. Nahman said, when the Lord created Adam he created him double faced: then he split him and made two backs (Genesis Rabbah 8.1).

The Bible has no monopoly on a hermaphroditic tradition. It is interesting to see how humanity shares this concept. Plato's Symposium speaks of the first person being hermaphrodite, having four arms and four legs and being so mobile that gods, incensed with jealousy, sawed him in half, after which, and forever after, one half has been looking for the other.²

This 14th century work of Meister Bertram [Figure 1] is another fine example of the androgynous Adam giving birth to Eve. His masculine parts are wholly suppressed. Only by portraying his feminine aspect can the artist make credible a man giving birth. The scriptural verse is Genesis 2:21, the famous rib story. God has put Adam to sleep to withdraw a rib from him, out of which he built the woman. The Hebrew word for rib gives us pause. It is "tsela", which also means side. Thus, we are given to understand that the feminine side was removed from the androgynous Adam.

So we see that in both creation narratives, Genesis 1 and 2, the original Adam was understood to be androgynous. The capping



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verse, however, comes in Genesis 5, when the creation story is reviewed and our text reads that God created Adam, male and female, that he blessed them and called "their" name Adam. So in three instances, then, we read that from the very beginning the primordial human being incorporated both sexes.

What we understand now is that biologically and psychologically each sex incorporates aspects of both sexes.

I was in the University Press bookstore in Berkeley last week in preparation for this event. Two books came to my attention within minutes of each other. The first was Jesus As Mother by Caroline Bynum; the second was The Nursing Father, a study in the leadership of Moses by Aaron Wildavsky. Fate knew I was planning this talk. The concept of the nursing father comes from Numbers 11:12. Since we have been talking about androgynous Adam, it is appropriate at this point to talk about other feminine functions in a male, this time in connection with Moses.

Israel in the desert has hit another one of its routine depressions, this time yearning for the familiar menus of the good old days in Egypt, the fish and cucumbers and melons and leeks and onions and of course the garlic, and all they have now is manna, which according to magic midrash is supposed to taste like anything you want it to. But when you have garlic on the brain, who needs theological appetizers?

Moses is fed up and complains to God. Why have you put this on me? Did I conceive this people (get pregnant), did I give birth to them that YOU should say to me, carry them in your bosom as a nursing father carries a sucking child? In Hebrew there is no feminizing of any of those terms. The man is doing all of it. And while a man can only metaphorically conceive and give birth, the Hebrew permits him to identify himself as a nursing father, i.e., a grammatical male calling forth from within him a feminine function.

If Adam is androgynous, and Moses is a nursing father, what does it mean that Adam and Moses and the rest of us were created in the image of God? What does that say about God? How does this affect our view of God? Here is an illustration in which the god Zeus acquires parturient capabilities and delivers Dionysius from his thigh into the waiting arms of Hermes [Figure 2]³.

Israel repudiates the idea of sexuality in God. Yet the language we ascribe to God gives God both masculine and feminine roles.

Listen to some of the feminine aspects of God:

1. In Isaiah we read that God goes into labor:
Now I will cry out like a woman in travail,
I will gasp and pant (42:14b).
2. God remembers Zion lovingly like a mother:
Can a woman forget her sucking child
that she should have no compassion on the
son of her womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget
you (49:15).
3. Again, God is like Zion in labor, bringing
forth children:
Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to
bring forth?
says the Lord; shall I, who cause to bring
forth, shut the womb? (66:9).
4. God is a comforting mother:
As one whom his mother comforts,
so will I comfort you (66:13).
5. God is even a midwife:
Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
You kept me safe upon my mother's breast.
Upon you was I cast from my birth . . .
(Psalm 22:9f, cf. Psalm 71:6).

What do we mean when we say Israel repudiates the sexuality of God? Sexuality would limit God. But we need the language.



The language makes God accessible to us, approachable. It's not that s/he is limited. We are limited. Every image is limited. Here are some partial images of Jesus. These are mosaics from 5th century Ravenna [Figure 3]. Abel is bringing the lamb for the sacrifice on the left. Opposite him on the right, Abraham brings Isaac to the altar. Both of them prefigure the sacrifice of Jesus. In this case, Jesus is both the lamb and Isaac, and Melchizedek, the priest who occupies the center, bringing the wine and bread. Each is a partial aspect of Jesus.

In this 14th century painting from Bologna [slide], the tree of life and knowledge has coaliesced to become the cross. Again, these are partial images which convey a limited concept to us. Each is true in a certain way.

I have taken all these images from the Hebrew Bible, because that's where it begins. The Hebrew Bible sets the precedent.

There is less feminine God imagery in the New Testament, writes Caroline Bynum in Jesus As Mother⁴, citing one of the few such incidents in which the nurturing Jesus is seen as a hen gathering her chicks under her wing (Matthew 23:37).

After the patristic period, however, elaborate maternal imagery describing God and Christ appears, coming to full flower between the 12th and 14th centuries, in the works of medieval theologians and in particular in the Cistercian monks.

The breasts of the beloved in Song of Songs become, in the works of William of St. Thierry, descriptions of Christ feeding and instructing the individual soul:

. . . it is your breasts, O eternal Wisdom, that nourish the holy infancy of your little ones. [The soul] not attaining to that mouth of yours, she puts her mouth to your breasts instead . . ." (Bynum, p. 119).

But breasts are only the beginning of access to the mother's

imagery. The deepest desire is to achieve the ultimate intimacy with Christ by somehow entering his body. Christ's wounds, the openings of his body, acquire pseudo-uterine qualities:

Now we may not only thrust our fingers or our hand into his side, like Thomas, but through that open door may enter whole, O Jesus, even into your heart, the sure seat of your mercy (Bynum, p. 120).

This is a German woodcut [Figure 4], dating c. 1450, showing a series of relationships between Christ and the soul depicted as a woman. Christ is seen feeding her, sitting in intimate dialogue with her, undressing her, attending her in bed. These are all metaphors. By the end of the 16th century, Christ is more frequently and less provocatively pictured as a boy.⁵

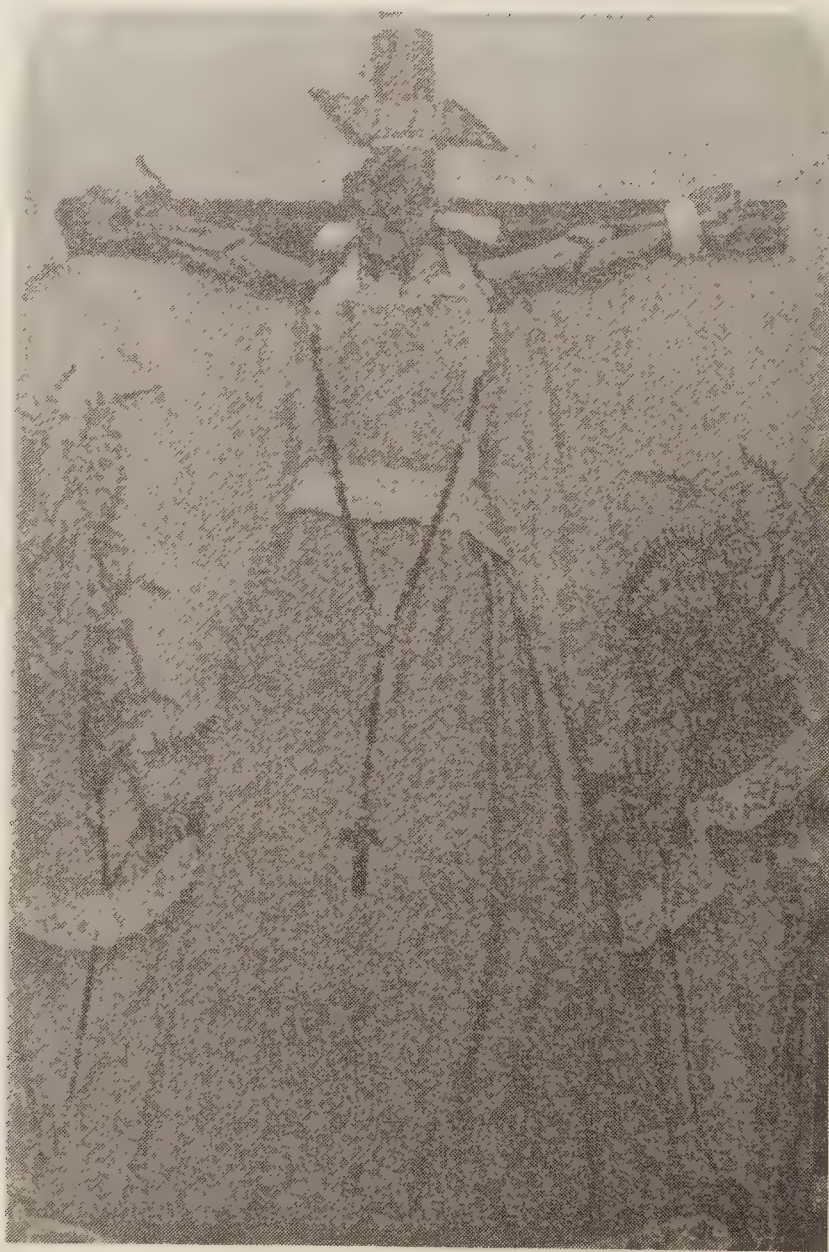
Nevertheless, as we all know, despite literary variations the established visualizations of the crucified savior have been masculine images. At this time, I can only give you a progress report on my research of the suppressed feminine images. Consultation with my colleagues has yielded both encouragement and ridicule, and three interesting examples.

[Figure 5] of a reproduced drawing from the Cooper Union Museum in New York shows the well-endowed figure of a woman as ruler of the world, holding the attributes of sovereign power--the pair of Scales of Justice and the sword with which to enforce Peace--and she is labeled "Christus Iudex", Christ the Judge. This pen and color wash-drawing dates from 1657. These few examples lead me to believe there is a considerable tradition of the feminine Jesus that needs to be rescued from oblivion.

Emilio Franceschi (1839-1890), a little-known 19th century romantic, has left us the sensuous sculpture of Eulalia, the Christian martyr (1880), in white marble, 7'4½" high, in the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Turin [Figure 6]⁷. St. Eulalia, who lived in 4th century Merida, was martyred at the age of 12. No, it is not Jesus on the cross. It is a small leap of the imagination to transfer us from the figure of a woman martyr not Jesus,



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to the archetypal martyr herself.

The third example [Figure 7] is from the healing church of Chimayo, Our Lord of Esquipulas, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. My consultant, curator at the Museum of International Folk Art of Santa Fe, reports that it is a common practice in Latin communities, including Spain, for lay people and nuns to provide a change of clothes for the sacred statues, and amenities, and to dress them elaborately before taking them on processions through the streets.

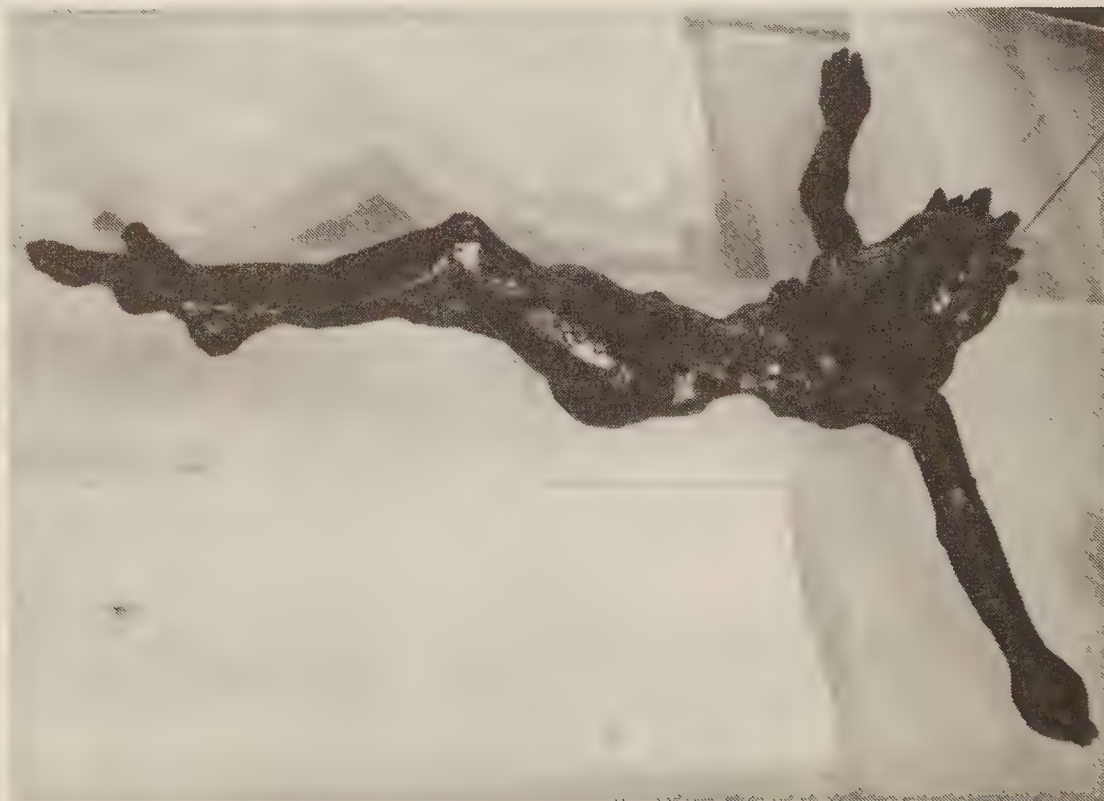
This bearded Christ on the cross wears a feminine gown. I don't know whether this was a conscious intent on the part of the person who dressed Christ, but it is clear to me that we have an androgynous image, a bearded man wearing a feminine gown, to convey to us the fact that Christ cannot be seen representing a single sex, but must incorporate both in him.

What do these feminine Christ figures say to us? What is the danger and what is the problem? Our challenge is to sustain intimacy in an old relationship, our relationship with God. Like any longstanding relationship, it can grow stale. Only new metaphors can revive it. Edwina Sandys has given us a new metaphor [Figure 8]. It's an old one in words, but a relatively new one visually. Christa is a woman who has known life. She has given birth. Looking up at her from the left side, her feet are not the nailed feet as seen from the right; they are feet that appear to dance. Can we afford to limit our vision of a savior to one of suffering only? It is a wonderful shock to the system. We can see the sacrifice anew, in a way that we haven't seen it before--a new freedom. But there is a danger, and the danger is being seduced by material, failing to see beyond the image. Really good art must be transparent. It has to carry us beyond it. When Israel stood on Sinai, God said to them, "God spoke to you from the fire. You heard the voice, you saw no form, only the voice" (Deuteronomy 4: 12). The idea is that we must not get hung up on the image and be stopped by the image.

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If anything is idolatrous, it is being limited by the image and being prevented from seeing past it to what it really stands for, or leads us to. Thus, all our images of Christ, whether the Lamb, whether Isaac, whether Melchizedek, whether male or female or androgynous, whether the feminine soul, all of those are small aspects of a larger whole. For us to maximally grow and understand and be inspired by the images, we must see it only in its partial sense, and then see beyond it.

Let's examine for a moment the powers of abstraction. Here too we are dealing with parts of an image that stand for the greater whole. I want to suggest that by isolating parts, and viewing different angles, we can gain a more subtle appreciation of the whole.

[Slide] In 1924, Georgia O'Keefe wrote about her painting, Dark Abstraction:

. . . a hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or a tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.

[Slide] In 1927, she wrote about Black Abstraction:

I was on a stretcher in a large room, two nurses hovering over me, a very large bright skylight above me. I had decided to be conscious as long as possible. I heard the doctor washing his hands. The skylight began to whirl and slowly become smaller and smaller in a black space. I lifted my right arm overhead and dropped it. As the skylight became a small white dot in a black room, I lifted my left arm over my head. As it started to drop and the white dot became very small, I was gone. A few

weeks later all this became the Black Abstraction.

[Slides] This pair are both images of the fertility goddess of the ancient Greek world, the very well-endowed Artemis of Ephesus. The bronze abstract sculpture, however, was done in 1960 by Aldo Casanova and can be seen at the Riverside Art Center and Museum. It is a pillar carefully crafted of stone and bronze, fusing the cubist and constructivist elements of his predecessors. He has designed a formal frontal sculpture with a focus on interior volume. It says in a singular quiet manner what the late antique piece announces hyperbolically.

[Slide] The abstraction here is Masayuki Oda's carefully rendered fold of cloth called Double Canvas. It is fastened against a neutral ground by four real and rusty nails; Joan Hugo wrote in Artweek (July 16, 1983): "an ambiguous image of a disembodied but nonetheless impaled loincloth--the clear-eyed but sympathetic version of the final stage of the Passion of Christ." Somehow the suffering of this suspension of weight and mass came to me much more clearly through the abstraction than it has heretofore through the actual representational human form.

And now the Christa which followed the Christa [Figure 9]. Edwina Sandys has withdrawn the torso and left us to view her head, a breast, her hands and feet. We no longer have the hanging sinewy body. What is left for us are only limbs of communication. The message they communicate to me is that the suffering is over: hands that reach out in the gesture of blessing, and feet lifted in dance. Her sleeping head rests in greater repose, and the breast augurs nourishment and new life.

If I could have my wish now, what would it be? Now that Christians have Christa, I'd like to see a feminine image relating to the Akedah, the Binding of Isaac, a primary symbol in Jewish art which is viewed by Christianity as prefiguring the crucifixion.

In the contemporary painting by Mordecai Ardon, Sarah weeps over a dead Isaac, the worst of her fears come true. In the

midrash, it is that vision that kills her. I would like to see Sarah restored to the vast iconography of the Akedah as Christa is restored to Christianity, where she belongs. Perhaps if Sarah were activated in the Akedah, an assertive feminine presence in both theologies, Christian and Jewish, might put a different ending to so-called "inevitable" sacrifice. Enough, the keening of the mother over the child's dead body on the lap that bore him!

In the last slide, I have deliberately placed Christa on her side. If she is on the cross, she is most certainly on the altar.

Postscript

I just came across a little note to myself. Don't forget Chaim Potok's Asher Lev. What is the connection between My Name Is Asher Lev and Christa? You may recall that Asher Lev is about an orthodox Jewish boy who becomes an artist over the objections of his father and teachers who had Talmud in mind for him. In the course of his classical renaissance training, he learns to paint the nude, which raises more than eyebrows in a community where an uncovered head is a form of nakedness. The ultimate treachery, however, is the crucifixion which he must paint, because (Potok claims in outrageous error), "there was no aesthetic mold in his own religious tradition into which he could pour a painting of ultimate anguish and torment"^o, the crucifixion under whose shadow so many innocent Jews were slain.

The surprise comes in the choice of the crucified figure. It is his mother who mediates in this battle with the male authorities of Asher Lev's family and community, in order to advance her son's artistic career. When alienation declares war it is his mother who is crucified against the venetian blinds.

I drew my mother in her housecoat, with her arms extended along the horizontal of the blind, her wrists tied to it with the cords of the blind, her legs tied at the ankles to the vertical of the inner

frame with another section of the cord of the blind. I arched her body and twisted her head. I drew my father standing to her right, dressed in a hat and coat and carrying an attache case. I drew myself standing to her left, dressed in paint-splattered clothes and a fisherman's cap and holding a palette and long spearlike brush. . . . We were looking at my mother and at each other. I split my mother's head into . . . segments, one looking at me, one looking at my father, one looking upward. The torment, the tearing anguish I felt in her, I put into her mouth, into the twisting curve of her head, the arching of her slight body, the clenching of her small fists. . . . I painted in a strange nerveless frenzy of energy. For all the pain you suffered, my mamma. For all the torment of your past and future years, my mamma . . . for all the anguish this picture of pain will cause you . . . for the unspeakable mystery that brings good fathers and sons into the world and lets a mother watch them tear at each other's throats. For the Master of the Universe, whose suffering world I do not comprehend (Potok, pp. 212-13).

I suppose it is fitting that in this setting, where Potok has denied an iconography of human suffering to Judaism, at least he does creative things with the alien tradition. But the ultimate irony is that she is a Jewish mother, this first Christa in the American Jewish literary tradition, sprung full grown in 1972 from Chaim Potok's clacking typewriter. Now if we could only resurrect Asher Lev's actual painting. . . .

Endnotes

¹Can be seen in Jean Cassou, Chagall, from the series, A Praeger World of Art Profile, 1965, pp. 107, 118, 119.

²I have expanded this subject in an article called "Some Second Thoughts About Adam's First Wife," to appear in a forthcoming publication, Intrigue in the Garden: Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis by Mellen Press.

³The Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, trans. by Richard Aldington and Delano Ames and revised by a panel of editorial advisors from Larousse Mythologie Générale, ed. by Felix Guirand, New York: Prometheus Press, 1960, p. 184.

⁴Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus As Mother, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

⁵Rudolph Berliner, "God Is Love," Essays in Honor of Hans Tietze, 1880-1954, ed. E. Gombrech, J.S. Held, O. Kurz, May, 1958, Figure 4 from p. 151.

⁶Berliner, p. 145.

⁷Alban Butler, The Lives of the Saints, London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1942, v. 2 p. 180 and v. 12 pp. 120-121.

⁸Chaim Potok, My Name Is Asher Lev, New York: Knopf, 1972, p. 313.



Dear Edwina Sandys,

I wanted to write you my feelings and reactions to the Christa. I was overwhelmed by being in her presence. From the point of view of a teenager whose eyes are open to new ideas, I think that she and her creator are magnificent. I felt privileged to see the Christa and would like to see more of this sort of thing happening around the world and in the churches.

Thank you,

Wendy Jo Snyder

Reflections on the Christa from a Christian Theologian

by Dr. Edwina Hunter

Let me state the obvious: The Christa is the statue of a crucified woman, and in her presence I find it most difficult to be objective. And I'm not at all sure that I should be as I talk about the Christian theological implications suggested by the Christa.

The Cross--but not the Cross by itself--the Cross and the Resurrection are central to Christian theology: the Cross as it has to do with the historical crucifixion of the historical man Jesus and the Resurrection as the release of the Christ who was incarnate in Jesus to be born and to live anew in the new human being--in all Christians who themselves would choose to take up their cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24).

For the Christian, the Cross must be dealt with as both reality and symbol--the historical reality of the crucifixion of the man Jesus--and the symbolic implications the Cross has for Christians now and which it had even within the pages of the New Testament. The Cross as symbol is not peculiar to Christianity. The Cross is seen by many to be an "inversion" of the Tree of Life or the Tree of Paradise:

Like the Tree of Life, the cross stands for the 'world axis'. Placed in the mystic Centre of the cosmos, it becomes a bridge or ladder by means of which the soul may reach God . . . it stands for the conjunction of opposites. . . . Jung comments that in some traditions

the cross is a symbol of fire and of the sufferings of existence, and that this may be due to the fact that the two arms were associated with the kindling sticks which primitive (human beings) rubbed together to produce fire, and which they thought of as masculine and feminine.¹

However, it is possible that:

The basic idea behind the symbolism of crucifixion is that of experiencing the essence of antagonism, an idea which lies at the root of existence, expressing as it does life's agonizing pain, its cross-roads of possibilities and impossibilities, of construction and destruction.²

The description of Jesus' crucifixion in Matthew 27, as well as in the other Gospels, shows crucifixion to be torturous, slow, agonizing; and the crucified one is subjected to the basest of all possible indignities.

And now the question: why would Edwina Sandys choose, or be chosen by God, to sculpt a statue of a crucified woman? With the realization of all the pain and horror of crucifixion, why a crucified woman? The Christa stands as a symbol, certainly, but a symbol of what?

I would like to examine the crucifixion of Jesus as symbolic in three regards: (1) it made Jesus a curse; Galatians 3:13 reads, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us--for it is written (the reference is Deuteronomy 21:23), 'cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree;'" (2) the Cross itself became a symbol of the Christian's own union with Christ; to follow Christ meant that the Christian's old self was crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6); (3) the Cross is a symbol for the defeat of death and is an integral part of Resurrection theology (I Corinthians 1 and 15).

What I would like to do right now is indulge in a kind of theological free association around these three ways in which Jesus' Cross was symbolic and how in similar fashion the Christa is symbolic for women and, perhaps, for all humanity today.

First, the Cross as a curse. There is no doubt that Jesus crucified was a stumbling block and a scandal (Galatians 3:13). But through the centuries we have managed to sterilize and sanitize away the scandal and the ugliness. What we revere is not only the empty Cross but the cross of precious metal, bedecked with jewels--the beautiful cross. Some accuse us of totally triumphal theology that ignores the reality of suffering and the Cross. In worshipping or idolizing the symbol, we become desensitized to the reality.

But those around that Cross on that first so-called "Good" Friday knew that it caused intense suffering and they knew it to be a curse and a scandal. The crowd mocked and taunted the one who hung there. He had spoken out against injustice and for the outcast. He had identified himself with God. He had challenged the establishment. He had to be crucified. And as one friend said:

Through the shameful, scandalous act of crucifixion, Jesus as the Christ was glorified. And Christians, all Christians, knew that to follow Christ was to take up their crosses. But only if they were male? Must the Christ be embodied only in a male body because Jesus was male? NO! So when we are confronted by the Christa--which portrays the suffering of an endless procession of women who have borne their crosses₃ in the name of Christ--we cannot be objective. We cry.

Paul said, "Yet not I live but Christ lives in me." This is to be the goal of every Christian. But it occurs to me that the Christ in women is precisely what religious establishment would crucify: the Christ within the woman who is called to speak out against injustice and for the outcast; the woman who challenges the establishment; the woman who identifies herself with Jesus

and who is herself called to take up her cross and be a witness and a faithful disciple.

If we need an example of this, all we have to do is turn to what happened in 1974, when eleven women were "irregularly ordained" to the Episcopal priesthood, thereby speaking out against injustice, speaking up for their outcast sisters, and challenging the religious hierarchy. As they hung suspended for months stretching into years, the crowds mocked with taunts such as these: "in a masculine role, 'woman will become incurably frigid, . . . incurably promiscuous, . . . or destructive;" "bitchy and greedy;" "violent;" and associated with "disease;" "vehicles for guilt and disillusionment;" "woman nudges us (us being males, of course) 'into world, flesh, and even, sometimes, the territory of the devil;" "prostitute;"⁴ "a charming seductive exterior;" someone who could "bedevil."⁴ These were taunts actually made as male priests sought to reach a decision about whether women had a right to be ordained. After her "irregular ordination," one of these eleven, the Rev. Carter Heyward, was celebrating the Eucharist when a priest came to the altar, ostensibly to receive the elements from her hands. Instead, he suddenly reached out and clawed the backs of her hands, inflicting bloody scratches.⁵

Or take last summer's action of Southern Baptists against the ordination of women because "women are responsible for bringing sin into the world."⁶

Jesus, himself, used the Cross as a symbol to signify the suffering and death his followers must be prepared to undergo. Luke 14:27 reads: "Whoever does not bear his/her own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Those who deny woman's right to the symbol of the Cross are clearly denying her right to the reality of discipleship and the right to respond to what she perceives to be her call to take up her cross and follow the Christ.

What this statue of a crucified woman does is make real the symbol of the Cross: it puts us back in touch with the reality that

the Cross is a scandal and the one who hangs on it is cursed. The outcries of many to remove it from a church where it was on display caused Dean Morton of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine to say that some people were "scandalized." Bishop Walter Dennis said the display was "theologically and historically indefensible" and spoke of the statue as "shocking" him. A friend of mine observed: "Persons who say it is a scandal do so because it offends their traditional theology and they never realize that the true scandal is that it is a clear representation of what has been done to women through the ages." And we remember Galatians 3:13, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree."

Second, in the New Testament, the Cross itself became a symbol of the Christian's own union with Christ; to follow Christ meant that the Christian's old self was crucified with Christ. This statement demands that we reconsider the meaning of the incarnation. John 1:14 reads: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Cross as a symbol of the Christian's union with Christ suggests that the Word continues to be made flesh in and through the Christian--through the human body of the Christian as well as through the spirit. T.S. Eliot said so clearly, "You must not deny the body." But we do. What does it mean that God became a man in the flesh? In defense of the Christa, the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Bishop of New York, wrote: "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us . . . This means that the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity involved the taking on of humanity, of all 'flesh,' male and female."⁸

This may very well be the theology on which some ethnic groups have based their creations of Black, or Brown, or even Americanized white Christs. What I think needs to be said clearly here is that as Christians, neither ethnics nor women deny the reality of an historical man named Jesus who lived in Galilee. All accept the traditional crucifixion of a male body as portrayed in the Gospels. However, if the Christ is universal as Christian theology asserts, then we must recognize that we are edging toward idolatry of the human male body itself if we insist that the only representation of a crucifix must be that of a crucified

male.

A Black pastor, speaking of the "distortion" of Christ into a white Christ, insists that Blacks must speak "in terms . . . of a Black Christ to correct this distortion."⁹

One writer said: "God became man. This is scandalous enough, but it does not cover the ground."¹⁰ The Incarnation makes it clear that we do not have to reject our materiality, our bodies, in order to find God. And, yet, reactions to another statue of a crucified woman which was placed in Bloor Street United Church in Toronto, Canada, during the Good Friday Easter season of 1982, caused Pastor Clifford Elliot to write as follows:

The many reactions we received made us aware, as nothing else had, of the "heresies" of which we had been guilty in our church's teaching. When many people were shocked that a "mere" human form was placed beneath the cross because the cross, they said, was the place where Jesus Christ, and He, alone, had hung, we realized that we had denied Jesus' essential humanity. We had become deaf to his calls to all disciples to follow Him and take up the cross, not fall down and worship it. When people were shocked that a woman was depicted as crucified and concluded that we were implying that Jesus was a woman, we realized that in our teaching of the incarnation we had implied that to become human was to become male. This not only denied the total personality of God, with female and male characteristics; it also denied that God could be expressed in the form of a woman as well as of a man. Jesus was a man. True. But the Christ could have been a woman. That obvious truth some could not see. It offended others. It excited many.

The shock many felt at the nakedness of the sculpture showed us that as Christians we had implied, if not actually taught, that the human body is evil. Many kept referring to "that nude statue." They saw it as a deliberate sexual titillation. They failed to see the

difference between nudity as an obsession with sex, and nakedness which is our natural state. They failed to see nakedness as a condition of vulnerability and need. They forgot Jesus' words: "I was hungry and you fed me, I was naked and you clothed me."¹¹

But not only is the Cross a symbol for curse and a symbol for oneness with Christ--for the universality of the Christ, the Word made flesh in all of us--it is also a symbol for the suffering and for the putting to death of Death, and, as such, is an integral part of Paul's theology of Resurrection. Paul says: "For I delivered to you as of first importance . . . that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day . . ." (I Corinthians 15:3-5).

So many women through the ages have experienced so many different kinds of death. So many women are being put to death now: the phrase "feminization of poverty" puts us in touch with economic reality. TV movies and documentaries, magazine and newspaper articles are finally exposing the reality of battered women. Pornography, rape, and incest are daily instruments of crucifixion. If crucifixion and resurrection are so inextricably linked in Christian theology, if together they are at the Center, perhaps it is only as women are willing to admit the reality of the death/crucifixion they experience that they can also anticipate resurrection.

After viewing the statue of a crucified woman which I mentioned earlier (by Canadian sculptor, Almuth Luthenhaus), one woman wrote to the pastor: "I felt a great sense of pain that I had to bear because my body is female, and of the oppression I experience simply because my body is like that of the sculpture. The face was so similar to that of a battered woman that I had counselled years ago that I was startled . . ."¹²

Another woman wrote: "I am a Christian feminist and have experienced a lot of pain in feeling alienated and not recognized by the church. I am referring here to the use of sexist language,

imagery, models of ministry and patriarchal theology. I long for the time when my sisters and I will feel support and respect from the church." She added; "It is profoundly moving to see a female symbol as a crucifix."¹³

All this caused Pastor Elliot to raise the same kinds of questions we have asked this evening: "What did the incarnation mean? Who is on the cross today? Can we feel and share the hurt of women who have been oppressed and exploited? Can we see ourselves on the cross? In fact," he said, "this one piece of art has done more for deep soul searching than many, many words have been able to do."¹⁴

And, for me, the Christa has provoked more soul searching than many words could do. So let me now compare this sculpture to a sermon. For me, it is a visual sermon, and, strangely, it is a sermon of hope. It is the Word made bronze, made flesh. It is an honest, painful Word. To have integrity as a sermon, it must be hermeneutically sound. It must be an authentic reinterpretation of the text or texts upon which it is based so that we, here and now, receive the Word with the same power and impact as did those of the original audience. As a sermon it must speak to us of God.

So let me tell you about that original audience. Let me tell you what those people--those women saw when they saw Jesus hanging on the Cross. They saw a man, a human man they loved with all their hearts shamed and cursed, tortured, in the very worst of imaginable pain. They saw him stripped and beaten and they saw him as abandoned by God. They saw in his death their own death and the death of all their hopes. They saw what it meant to hang on a cross and he had promised them, his disciples, a cross of suffering as well.

What they saw was a man sacrificing everything (including his historical existence as a man) in order to die a death he had to die, in some sense had chosen to die because he had chosen to love and to be who he was and do what he had to do.

When many of us see the Christa we see all the women we have known and loved, and the women we have not known and yet love, shamed and cursed, tortured, raped, made the object of lust, and in sadomasochistic pornography hung on crosses;¹⁵ we see teenaged girls afraid to grow breasts, afraid to be beautiful, or refusing to be beautiful, refusing to be fully who they are because they do not want to become statistics among those millions and millions who throughout history have been crucified as objects of lust-- women who have themselves been taken up by crosses our world has built. And we see all those women who believe themselves one with the universal Christ and who as willing and joyful disciples choose to take up the Cross in love for humanity. We see them denied, shamed, mocked, laughed at, psychologically and bureaucratically crucified.

But there is more: what we feel is akin to what those around the Cross felt and what those who ran away felt. We grieve, we mourn, we are afraid; with Mary Magdalene we weep outside the tomb. And we are angry. With the anger of Peter when he preached at Pentecost: "This Jesus whom you crucified at the hands of lawless men." We say, "This woman whom you crucified at the hands of lawless men."

But there is still more: as a woman friend of mine said, "When I look at the Christa, I see me. That is me on that cross. And," she said, "the sunken, emaciated, wasted center of the Christa's body is the emaciated birth center of my body, rendered incapable of giving birth to the creativity and spirit within me."¹⁶

We ourselves are on that cross and we feel the pain and we feel . . . abandoned. And we cry out from that emptiness and aloneness: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me . . ." And we beg to be able to say: "Into your hands I commit my spirit. It is finished." And we wonder if we will all have to hang there, incapable even of death, until we can pray: "Forgive them, Mother, for they know not what they do." The reality is they do know what they are doing and so we think perhaps only God can forgive those who know what they do.

Need I say: no crucifix of Jesus I have ever seen has preached to me with the power of the original reality as does the Christa.

No sermon in words I have ever heard preached has moved me to such oneness with all my crucified sisters everywhere--whatever their color, race, nationality, or economic standing. The Christa does for us what no statue of a crucified ethnic male can do: it breaks down ethnic barriers, cuts across all lines, expresses all woman humanity in our nakedness, vulnerability, and death. And it is exactly at this point that the Christa becomes fully a sermon of hope, because it is as we embrace our own nakedness and vulnerability and death that we find we can also embrace the tomb. And outside the tomb stand all our Mary Magdalene sisters believing when others have refused to believe--weeping and waiting--ready to be witnesses to the Resurrection that must inevitably follow the curses and the Cross.

Notes

¹J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, New York: Philosophical Library, 1962, p. 66.

²Cirlot, p. 68.

³Conversation with Sharon Busch, Berkeley, California, October 16, 1984.

⁴Sonja K. Foss, "Women Priests in the Episcopal Church: A Cluster Analysis of Establishment Rhetoric," Religious Communications Today, Vol. 7, September 1984, p. 5.

⁵I. Carter Heyward, A Priest Forever, New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

⁶San Francisco Chronicle, June 14, 1984.

⁷Conversation with a friend, Berkeley, California, October 15, 1984.

⁸Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., "Statement on the Figure of the Crucified Woman," undated news release.

⁹Warner R. Fraynham, Christian Faith in Black and White, Wakefield, Massachusetts: Parameter Press, Inc., 1973, p. 91.

¹⁰Fraynham, p. 14.

¹¹Clifford Elliot, "Crucified Woman," Connect (a newsletter for women's groups in the United Presbyterian Church), March/April, 1984, p. 2.

¹²Elliot, p. 12.

¹³Elliot, p. 13.

¹⁴Elliot, p. 3.

¹⁵Hannah Tillich, From Time to Time, New York: Stein and Day, 1974, p. 14.

¹⁶Conversation with a friend, Berkeley, California, October 16, 1984.



*a figure of power. Reminder of Jewish-Femine roots
for doing Christology that is inclusive.
Thanks!*

I found another Christ, Christa today.

*She is vulnerability, suffering, agency, gentleness
and power.*



Reflections on the Christa

from a Priest

by Dennis J. Steik, S.M.

When I look at CHRISTA, I know that we have "kissed Sleeping Beauty good-bye forever." For anyone that has an intellectual, artistic, or "heart" problem over the CHRISTA, I recommend reading Madonna Kolbenschlag's book, Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye. In 1980, I was privileged in being a participant in the Institute of Spirituality and Worship (ISW), a renewal program founded by Jake Empereur and Sandra Schneiders at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Mary Ann Finch, a teacher of holistic spirituality, taught about the challenge of stretching beyond familiar boundaries, the liberation and integration made possible by crossing comfortable, safe, status quo borders. In the 1970's, I would have looked at CHRISTA and wondered what the church and culture were coming to but today I can look upon the CHRISTA as a contemplative work of art that calls myself, culture, and the church to conversion. I can say, "Why not?" And I can honestly question: "WHY HAS IT TAKEN SO LONG?" Perhaps the answer will help identify the strength and the persistence of male domination over Christianity, education, culture, and the recording of history. How many feminine historians can you name? How many women have been presidents of colleges and universities? How many women stand out in public life? Until recent times, could we name any Christian feminine priests or bishops? In the Roman Catholic tradition, as interpreted by the magisterium, we may not be able to do so for some time to come. It appears that many have a great difficulty with adjusting to the hermeneutics of suspicion and intellectually accepting that the Christian Scriptures reveal some women as heads of domestic churches, local

communities of faith. They may have been heads of such communities with or without "ordination" as understood by the magisterium today but why has so much been so carefully hidden? What is there to fear? Who and what are threatened by CHRISTA, by this symbol of the Anointed One present to us as a woman? In Christ we are all one in such a way that we are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Christ and CHRISTA, can they not be viewed as integral aspects of a holistic salvation that is absolutely universal? There need not be a dichotomy or a dualism that leads us away from a contemplative vision.

New myths are needed to both mirror and model the greater consciousness emerging from our pain and struggle to open ourselves humbly and vulnerably before the collective unconscious. There is so much to learn and the CHRISTA has so much to teach us! She speaks clearly of the cultural and spiritual metamorphosis taking place in our day. It is a metamorphosis for which our age hungers and thirsts. CHRISTA speaks of a liberation in which both women and men can come to own their own souls. Madonna Kolbenschlag describes that liberation as a process by which, "I have rescued my spirit from repressive coercion, from inner compulsion and from the hazards of freedom itself."

CHRISTA simply but urgently invites me to enter more fully into the testing, reflecting, and living of relationships required of me before I can say, "My soul is now my own." Perhaps CHRISTA can equally be a challenge to the church to own HER OWN SOUL!

If the Soul of the church is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit can be approached as the feminine in God, why has Christianity been so repressive of women in both ministry and in the exercise of authority (authoring life)? It would seem clear that women have unique gifts for fostering and nurturing life that would of necessity call for their full and active participation if ministry and authority in the church are to be integral and healthy. What kind of sickness permeates the institution with a dominant and exclusive male priesthood that protects its clerical power at the expense of excluding women and denying Eucharistic worship and

sacramental presence because there are not enough male clerics to meet the increasing demand within the local communities of faith? The answer is not more clerics but more genuine priests called forth by the laity out of the qualified men and women in their own midst.

I look at CHRISTA and I hear a call to faith, a faith asked of women and men, "who would be truly free," a faith that "is not backward-looking or nostalgic; nor . . . blindly iconoclastic and memoryless." It is the kind of faith that "nurtures the seed of our future becoming in the revelation of the present, in a tradition that remains faithful to itself by transcending itself." (Quoted from the "Introduction" in Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye by Madonna Kolbenschlag, Bantam Books edition, 1981.)

Take time to visit the CHRISTA. Stand before her in silence and see what masks she lifts. Allow her to move in the depths of your shadow, ego, and emerging self. Perhaps you will hear an inner invitation to come and walk on God's Water and to dance in the consuming Fire of God's Love.



The incarnation has become real!
'God' come as human - as
a woman like me. If calls to
mind the song by Chris Wellmonson
when she sings: "Lean on me I am
your sister)
Lean on me I
am your friend."

Christa is That - she calls to
me to lean on her - for she is
my sister.

Reflections on the Christa

from a Poet

by Anne Dilenschneider

I want off this cross!
I asked for this,
or did I?
Where is it written
that honed to bone
I must hang?
Was not the path to this
enough?
Enough!
There was nothing left
between us
would you tear out my heart
and throw it to the wolves?
Perhaps it would be
kinder,
I'd die sooner
and the blood would drip
painlessly
and this writhing body
would rest,
the tortured scream
lost to the wind.
Your game would be over
wouldn't it?

I want to forget you.
Would that you would
forget me,



but one inch from hell
you catch me in your hand
and I am foolish enough to be
grateful
for the slightest favor.
Just once
let me slip through those fingers
and die.

NO!
I will fight you.
If you are fool enough
to start another round
I will strive
to equal you
in godliness
or whatever perversity
you play.
I will match you at your game
though hobbled
by this
DAMN
cross.



Reflections on the Christa from a Pastor

by the Rev. Dr. Gloria Smallwood

I had heard that Christa was a crucified woman; but the first time I saw her, it was impossible to ignore that she was a Black woman. I had had no idea that this woman would come out to grab me and make me feel as though we were old friends. My mind continued to emphasize that Christa was Black and the first of a thousand thoughts about her was that Christa had been given to us to say what the crucified man had said: "There is more." Christa was no accident and there was no accident in her blackness. Sandys, it seemed, had been led to choose the bronze; Christa would be the conveyer of the additional information, the added understanding. What was done to the Christ continues to be done, and Christa reminds us that it continues.

It is evident, then, that as I examined Christa I had almost made her Negro. The more I looked the more I realized that she had keen features and she reminded me of the early days of integrated basal readers when publishers simply colored the white characters brown. I searched Christa for other signs of blackness; my search was not satisfied until my eyes rested on Christa's feet. Christa has the feet of a Black woman. Her feet say no one will understand life and living until they have walked in "my" steps. Her feet suggest that if one would stand where she stands one would gain important perspective and insight.

But I knew also that Christa was all women, all people of color. She was the reminder of injustice and oppression. As I looked on her I could feel the suffering that comes when one is poor or

different. I could remember what it was like being at the mercy of the police who arrested those who protested against exploitation and discrimination. As I viewed Christa she became a symbol of the fight for liberation. The Crucified man said there is more and brought redemption; the crucified woman says there is more and brings us hope.

There was a great temptation to try to put Christa in the place of Christ but the longer I looked upon her the more certain I became that she had come in addition to, not instead of Christ. She speaks to the reality of God's continuing revelation. For many, Christa seems to blaspheme, much the same way the Crucified man was viewed. But Christa presents a needed stimulation as many settle and conform to notions about God that are too limited. Christa says expand. She encourages us not to sit idly by thinking we already have the whole of what God has for us to know.

There are many things about Christa that offend others. To begin with, there is her nakedness. Unlike the Crucified man, Christa is not allowed modesty. What she is is there to be viewed by any who wish to look. She is exposed from head to toe and is vulnerable. The very nature of her circumstance permits whosoever will to come and ravage her. She must do all that she has to do, say all that can be said, and she must put up with, endure, the conditions of the moment. The nakedness of Christa stands to call our attention to the nakedness in the world and even if we are not offended we are made to feel uneasy. Christa made me understand that there is more to nakedness than meets the eye. In yet another dimension Christa says there is more.

The cross behind Christa gave me much cause for anguish as I realized that so many crosses for the oppressed are white in color. For the first time in my life it occurred to me that many of the crosses we see today come as the forerunners to exploitation. The cross gained a negative connotation as it represented the "non-people of color" who make life miserable for the colored people of the world. Without the cross there would be much lost. Perhaps we wouldn't even be sure if crucifixion was what was

meant. But with the cross we find more to the thought of crucifixion than we perhaps ever thought before. Christa says to me, "There is more, even to crucifixion."

Christa prepares the way for me to be more open about what God would reveal through non-traditional means. She makes me aware that there are things that were never before a part of God's plan for humankind that are obvious from a post-resurrection point of view. She points out that just as those who crucified the man thought that the issues were settled, those who would crucify the woman think that she too can be silenced. Christa points us to a new dawn when the freedom of liberation will come in spite of many attempts to kill it. Christa reminds me that there is more in this fight for liberation than is apparent to any of us now. There will be freedom, there will be equal opportunity, there will be food and shelter and clothing. There will be an end to oppression. She tells me that no matter how dark or bleak things appear, there is more.

Christa makes me proud to be a Black Christian woman. She affirms my calling to new and inclusive terms and ideas. It always did seem right to me to think of God's way as a way that gave loving care to all who want it. Christa helps me end the reign of a male domination which insists that any and every idea I have of God be male. She says strongly that there is more to God than maleness. There is more to Christ than maleness. She implies that the more to be had will be inclusive and very extensive.

Finally, Christa says loudly to me, "Don't try to speak for me, I can speak for myself." And so more than any other thought comes the understanding that what Christa says to each of us will all be a part of the continuing revelation. Christa says, "There is more."

Reflections on the Christa from a Storyteller

by Elizabeth Morris

It is Labor Day weekend and I've come away to a church camp in the High Sierras with forty young adults. We have sung jubilant songs praising God the Father, the King, Lord and Conqueror. There have been seminars and speakers but little attention to group process or individual feelings. All four camp leaders are men.

Tonight after a spirit-filled talent show, I walked back to the cabin with Ingrid, a Swedish woman who is in California for an internship in physical therapy. She is a strong woman who traveled alone to Lebanon and spoke in front of the entire camp about her experiences. English is still a struggle. As we walked in darkness, I asked her to give me her response to the sculpture of Christa, a female on the cross.

Our conversation before my querie had been meditative, the easy give and take women often share. Now Ingrid jumped with fury and almost shouted, "Oh no, that's too much." She felt passionate as she explained that she sees people just shaping religion to fit their needs. Fear was in her eyes.

We continued our dialogue in the cabin almost oblivious to Sarah preparing for sleep on the other side. In response to Ingrid's defending the use of "God the Father", I said that some women feel unable to worship when God is exclusively male because their relationships with their own fathers have been alienating, destructive and unloving.

"That's exactly how I feel," Sarah broke in with pain and anger in her voice. "I haven't been able to worship or feel close to God this whole weekend. I'm so angry at what my father's done to me and the mess that my life is in, that I can't turn to my Heavenly Father. I can't do it." Songs of praise and celebration had been impossible for her to sing and accentuated her anguish and separation from God, her family, and from the group. An outcast.

Ingrid and I turned, stunned by the openness of one who had seemed so detached. The moment was holy. Christa was present.

We sat on bunk beds and listened to the tears and details of her story, her suffering. Christa. We lit a candle and sat around it on the floor praying out loud, reading psalms, giving Sarah a massage. Women sharing and knowing each other's pain intimately, softly and with conviction of the Resurrection. Christa, I said in my heart.



Reflections on the Christa from a Rabbi

by Rabbi Samuel G. Broude

My initial reaction: how strange to see a woman on the cross. Then, a sense of relief. If it were not necessary for Jesus to be so depicted, then Jews could no longer be accused, however falsely, of his death. While this would not eliminate anti-Jewishness, it would certainly help diminish it by removing a negative reminder of Jesus' Jewishness.

On the other hand, this very association, in its positive connotations, is what was missing for me. I am aware of a certain pride in the fact that the central figure in the Christian drama is a Jew who was part of Jewish history and whose life was lived as a Jew. Only recently has the Christian community begun to reclaim Jesus' Jewish background, and only recently has the Jewish community (at least its liberal components) begun to reclaim the Jewish Jesus as part of our long and difficult history. Does this get lost in changing the symbol?

Perhaps not. In my need to see Christa as particularly Jewish, I think of the much-maligned Jewish mother (before I had seen Jo Milgrom's article with its allusion to Potok's Asher Lev) whose depth of caring is expressed as sacrifice--for husband, children--and whose own identity often gets lost in the process. I think of my own late mother. I see her sitting by the radio, listening to reports of what the Nazis were doing to the Jews in Europe, and crying. I resolved then and there I would do something to alleviate her suffering (one of the reasons for my decision to become a rabbi). Here, in this sculpture, is a woman offering her suffering as redemptive, hopeful. She looks young, vulnerable, with quiet strength.

But is she Jewish?

Reflections on the Christa from a Theological Educator

by Sandra Winter Park

Last summer I taught a course at San Francisco Theological Seminary, in the Doctor of Ministry program, a six-day seminar: ISSUES OF SEXUALITY IN MINISTRY. The course description:

This course will move toward a theology of sexuality in ministry that manifests itself in mutuality, empowerment, faithfulness, integrity, intimacy, passion and joy for the pastor and the people. To facilitate working with the subject holistically, the course will combine a discussion of the texts with experiential learning through the use of movement, graphic visualizations, meditation, journal writing and ritual.

To work with issues of sexuality and mutuality in ministry, femaleness must be deeply integrated into the Christian concept of the divine. While some ministers and laypersons give verbal support to the importance of female god imagery, few have explored the implications of this: how it will expand and change their theology; how it will change relationships between women and men; how central it is to a just and healthy understanding and integration of sexuality in ministry.

So, I decided to work with the sculpture of CHRISTA as a way to integrate femaleness into an understanding of divinity in the Christian tradition, since the crucifixion is at the heart of that tradition. I asked the class members to draw an image of a female Christ before they had read Dr. Edwina Hunter's and Dr. Jo Milgrom's "Reflections on Christa" (as printed in this

journal), and before they had seen any representations of Christa. I asked them to draw and write again after reading the articles and viewing the sculpture of Christa. We took one class day to go to Pacific School of Religion's Badé Museum when the Christa could be viewed.

All class members had been active in ministry for many years. Other than that, the group was diverse. There were two women and thirteen men in the group; two Koreans (one male and one female); several men from Australia and New Zealand; two Roman Catholics (one laywoman and one Jesuit priest); one Hispanic man; and a mix of Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists. A few of the members were feminist and knowledgeable in issues of feminist theology.

With their permission, I will use words and drawings from members of the class to communicate the transformation that occurred as we worked intensively with Christa in the context of issues of sexuality in ministry. First, the words and the graphic visualizations of the women in the group:

CHUNG SOOK JA is a feminist minister from Korea. Reflecting on a female Christ, she writes:

If Christ becomes flesh again, Christ becomes woman today, I believe. Because Christ became flesh as a man once and he changed the male image as servant; today, Christ will come as a woman and she will change the female image as a servant. The beauty of a woman is not only outward looking, but the inner sense. If Christ will come as a women, she will work as a labourer, as a farmer, and as a housewife of a lower class family. She will cry with all the women who are suffering under oppression, politically, socially, economically, and religiously. She will be taken to the police and to prison to carry all the sins of this world, to become a political sinner. And she will cry for her children, who lose their mother. After she will resurrect she will appear to the oppressed children who

couldn't leave from the Calvary of her cross. Her children, men and women are together to stay at her suffering of the cross.

After seeing CHRISTA, Sook Ja writes this:

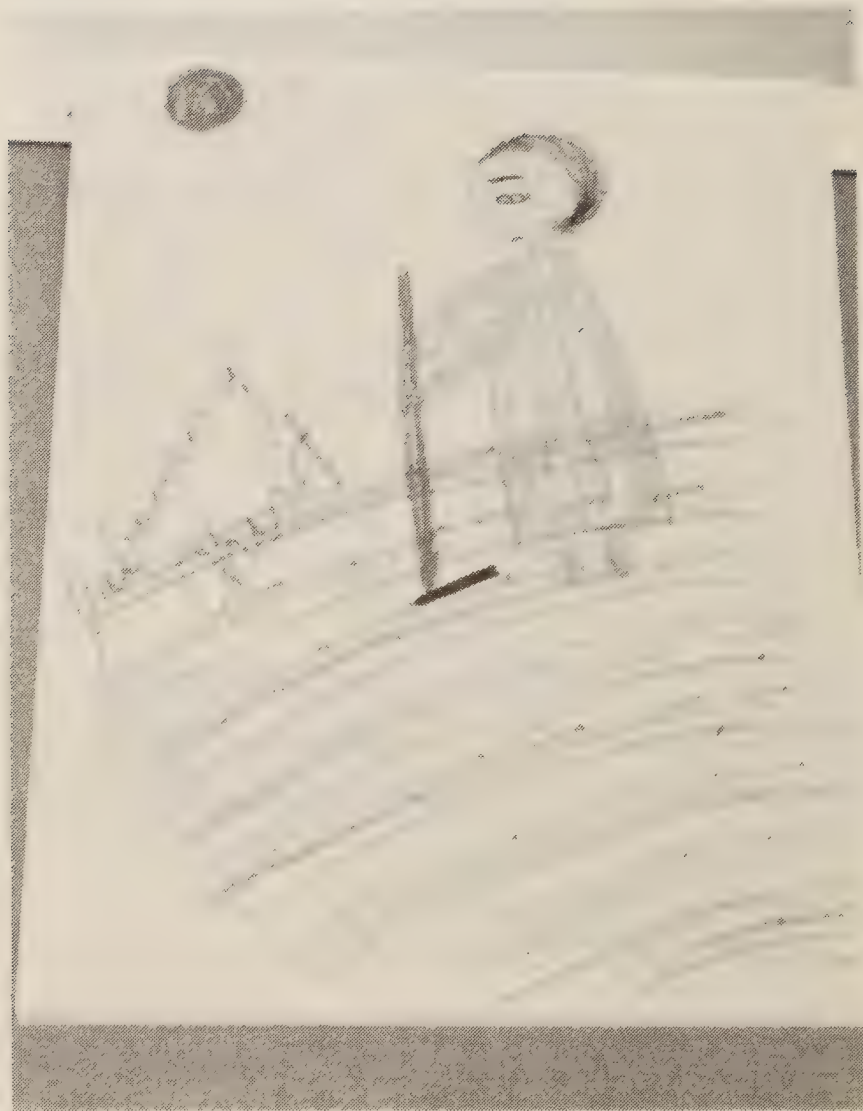
Today we went to Berkeley to see Christa.
Christa: female Christ in suffering. She was just like labourers. Her body was so thin that I could feel pain from her body, but her face was different. Her face was smiling even though she was on the cross, she could see the glory of God in her. So many women are suffering like Christa even now. Christa, she is a symbol of suffering woman. Christa, she is a symbol of new humanity of woman. From the suffering, life comes out again. This means that God is still suffering with the people, male and female. God is suffering with women who are oppressed in the society and in the family and even in themselves. Christa receives all the suffering of all women, so women should stand up and walk with joy and love into the world for peace.

I feel so sorry for those men who could not accept Christa. I pray for them to open their eyes to see God's image in Christa too.

Sook Ja's drawings do not have a cross in them. Her first drawing, a woman in a dress, looks more like a middle class woman. After viewing Christa, she draws a labouring woman in the fields as her representation of a female Christ (Photos 1 and 2).



1



2

MARY MARCOUX, a Roman Catholic lay minister, felt that she could not draw. She sketched her first drawing on a tiny scrap of paper. I asked her to fill up the large page with it. This figure (Photo 3) is fully covered and calls to mind pictures of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her second drawing describes in gentle lines a woman's profile, head crowned with thorns, looking intently at three crosses (Photo 4).

Marcoux writes of her anger at the exclusive language used by some men in the group:

I am too tired, too angry, and too frustrated tonight to write much of anything.

"Christa" was a beautiful experience today, but was overshadowed by "man--I use it in the generic sense." Man is 3 not generic. Why are

we allowing this kind of terminology at a graduate level in seminary? We're talking elementary stuff here! "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive!" (Isaiah 6:9).

I am so tired of mankind!

I think some were right today--Christ could never have come as a woman--nobody would have bothered to check the tomb!

This anger expressed itself in poetry. She responds to a poem by Kathryn Christenson, "Clues to a Second Coming". Christenson describes the coming of a female messiah, concluding her poem with

"God gave Mary an Easter sign, the Son is risen, a Daughter next time" (CHRISTIAN CENTURY, 5/16/77). Mary writes in response:

Why Christ initially came as a man rather than a woman:

1) Because at age 12 (or 22 or 52) she would not have been allowed in the temple, much less to speak aloud to the elders.

2) She would have been too busy baking bread to venture into the wilderness. She would have little time for temptation. The greatest temptation would have been to go to the wilderness in the first place.

3) At Cana, if she had told the servants to fill the containers to the brim and bring a sample to the wine-taster, would they have even listened to her?

4) If she had managed to ride in the boat to begin with, and then suggested that they throw their nets over the side, I have a feeling they would have tossed her over the side instead.

5) She would have had to prepare the Last Supper and then not have been able to speak or dine with the male guests present.

6) At her crucifixion would there have been any men who remained at the foot of the cross? And would anyone have even bothered to check the tomb on the third day?

The third contribution is a brief poem, by another woman, the spouse of a class member, who participated in the class as a visitor on the day we viewed Christa. Poet SUSAN COLE also photographed the drawings used in this article. She writes, simply:

Christa - I see the truth,
the reality of Christ
Female and Male - together -
compassion and power
Hope for humankind -
hope for me!
At last a true realization.
Why didn't I feel like this before?

Responses from men in the class revealed growing sensitivity and something of their own inner struggles in relation to all aspects of the feminine.

DAVID COLE, an Anglican from Australia, first drew a simple drawing of a cross, a circle divided and the word "Whole" in the center. He commented, "But only half of the whole has been there, the male half."

After reading about and view-

5

ing Christa, he drew a magnificent representation, dressed in purple, crowned with gold and embraced by a rainbow. He titled it, "Christa Regina". The female Christ as queen, the female Christ reigning. One woman seeing his picture remarked that it was easy for her to picture and identify with a suffering female Christ, but it was a brand



new thought to think of a glorified, female Christ, reigning as queen! (Photos 5 and 6)

BAE TAE DUCK, a Korean minister, demonstrates a profound appreciation of the nourishing Christa in his first drawing (Photo 7). His writings speak of compassion and liberation:

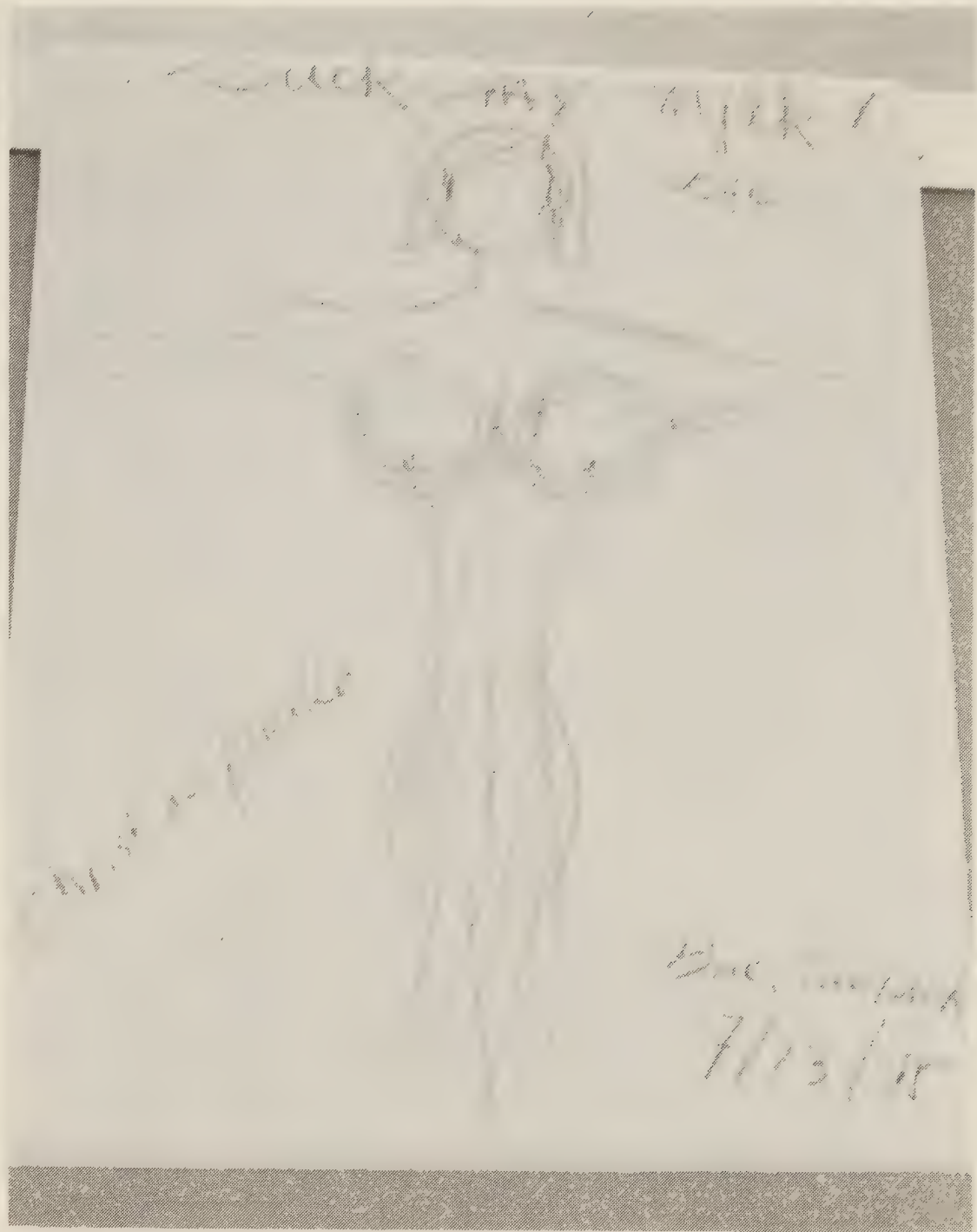
It was an experience for me to see "Christa" who was on the cross liberating human beings without any distinction of men and women. However, many women are suffering. I think God inspired Edwina Sandys to make that

Christa instead of Christ. Many people would think differently if the Christa sculpture was hung on the wall of a church instead of a museum. I think it will be good if the Christa could be hung on a church wall. Christa reminded me of the people who are living in suffering with Christ. Asian women, including Korean women, are living without enjoying the pleasure of life. They work very hard and yet they are not paid well. The tradition of a long history has oppressed them and they rarely have opportunity to join in the society. They are suffering mentally and physically. They have a sense of alienation and they have been ruled rather than to rule. I could see all this kind of suffering from

the Christa. Anyway, I pray that the image of Christa as well as Christ might be saturated in all people.

In a later writing Bae Tae Duck speaks of Jesus Christa:

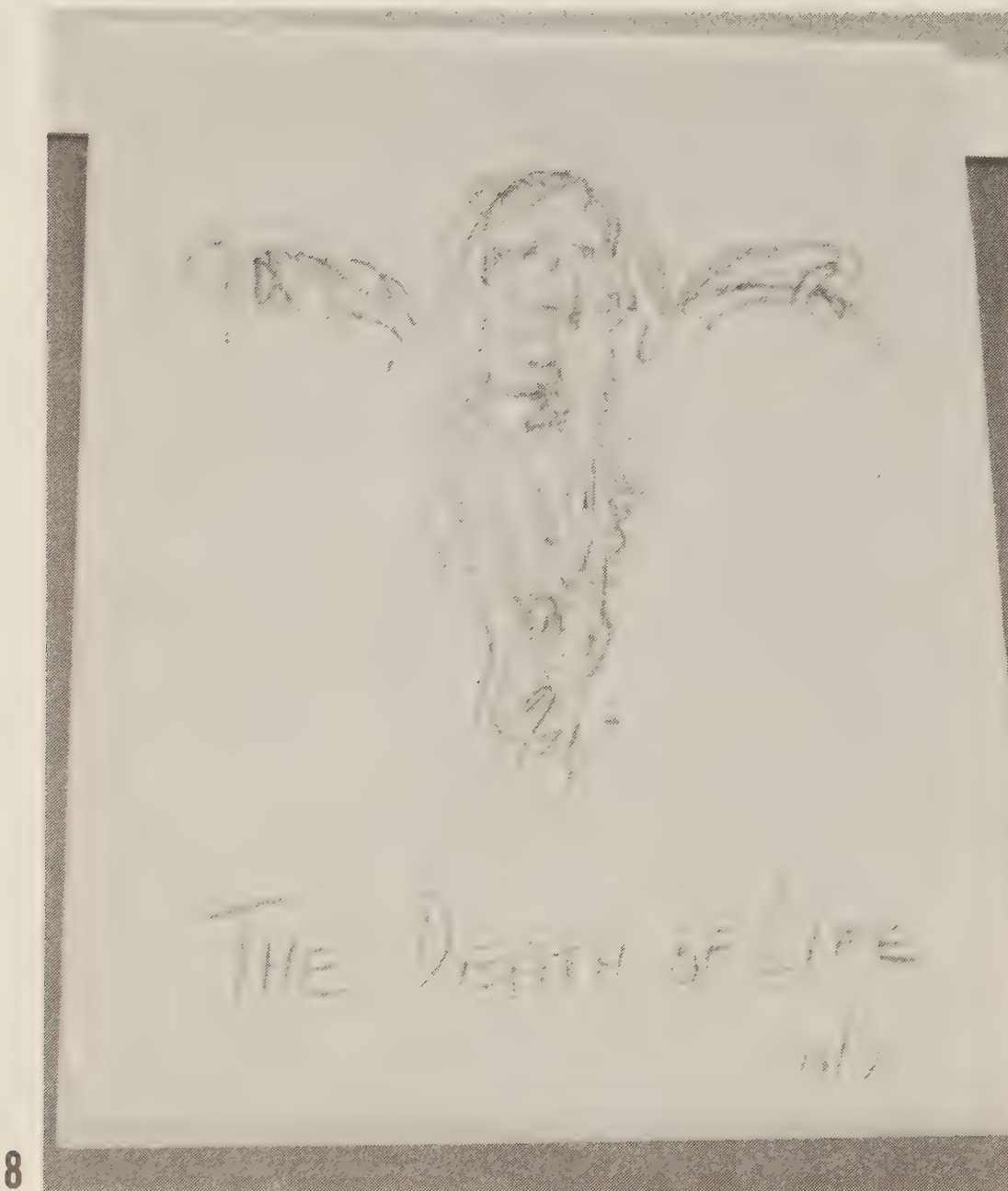
Jesus Christa will come to this earth. All people believe the truth that Jesus Christa is our Lord and Life as a Whole one without any confusion. We must learn together to share other's suffering like Jesus Christa.



DAVID PERSONS, a Presbyterian minister, writes of how Christa helps him affirm his female side:

I read the Christa material. I couldn't believe that it upsets people. I can't wait to "meet" this Christa, a crucifix of a naked woman. I would love to have such in my possession. I would be sure to use it on Good Friday! . . . I spent much of the day at PSR in Berkeley reflecting on Christa, the controversial female crucifix. . . . It was just beautiful. How easily I could fall in love with it. But images of women being oppressed and stripped and exploited all came out in it and so did my denied femininity. . . . Such a sculpture

only sealed my longing for wholeness to love all of me,
all of the world.



Jock Hoskings, a pastor from New Zealand, drew this very pained and anguished figure of a female Christ (Photo 8). He felt that a crucified woman represents the death of all of life, more than a crucified man does. Persons viewing his drawing have felt that it gave the feeling of a nuclear death.

A Baptist minister from Texas drew a female Christ and then crossed it out with a large X, saying that it was unacceptable to his hermeneutic. After viewing and reading about Christa, he drew a beautiful expression of mutuality, inclusiveness, partnership and compassion.

The cross in the middle had an androgynous figure on it (Photos 9 and 10).

On the day after the class visited Christa in the Badé Museum, we worked with the material in Phyllis Tribble's TEXTS OF TERROR, biblical narratives of violence and violation of four women: Hagar; the unnamed concubine, who was gang raped and killed; Tamar, who was raped; and Jephthah's daughter, who was sacrificed. The class was divided into small groups and each group was asked to focus on one chapter of Tribble's book and create a ritual in



9



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memory of the violated woman in their chapter. The work with Christa was also continued in this class session. Some class members were deeply affected by this juxtaposition of Texts of Terror with the Christa.



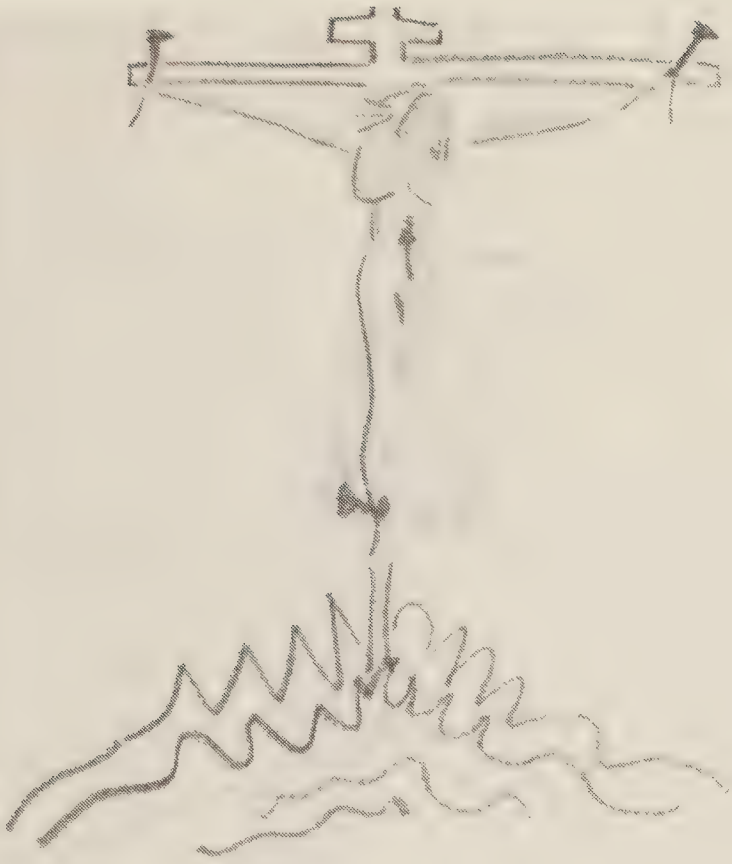
11

DAVID WOOD, an Anglican priest from Australia, drew four amazing visualizations. The first two, which were drawn before and after viewing Christa, are from the waist up. There is no cross and the figures are either masculine or androgynous looking (Photos 11 and 12). David writes that for some unknown reason he was unable to draw a female on the cross. But then he worked with the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter on the following day. After encountering that material, his drawings changed drastically. The final two are of the entire body, clearly female and clearly crucifixion scenes. The final one is

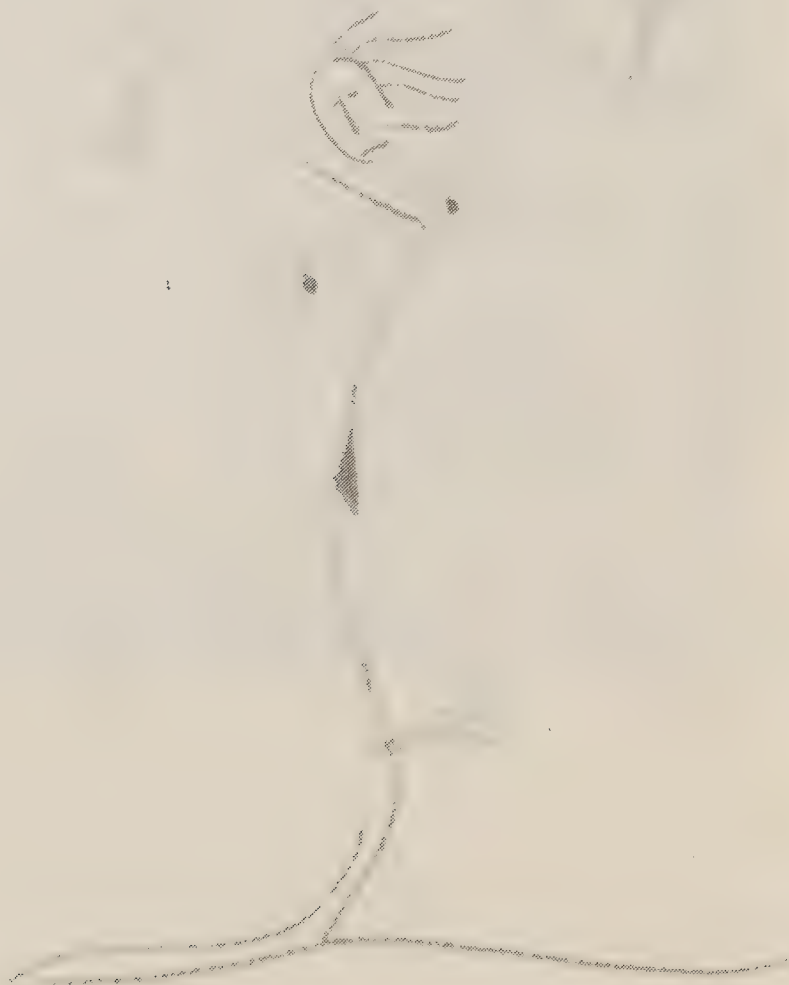
abstract and very powerful (Photos 13 and 14).



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13



14

The person in the final experience that I describe will remain anonymous. When he entered the course, he told the class that all of the women around him were strong women, and he didn't think there was any more problem relating to sexism. He intentionally used exclusive language, saying that mankind was generic and so he would use it. He did not draw any visualizations of Christa. On the day after visiting Christa, his group worked with the chapter in Tribble's book about the unnamed woman, the concubine who was raped and later cut into pieces.

The group was unable to deal with the violence and brutality to the woman in the story. They finally acknowledged that they had avoided it because they could not bring themselves to face this. However, the man whom I described was leading the group and had drawn a poignant and powerful visualization of the concubine, bleeding and knocking on the door, trying to get back inside. 15



But the door had no knob, he pointed out (Photo 15). This was the first visualization he had drawn in class. I was amazed at its intensity. In the next class session we were going around the group responding to the readings. He took out his pad and began drawing rapidly--a drawing of a casket (Photo 16). Then he began to weep. When it was his turn, he said, "My sister is in that casket. Her husband came home from World War II and beat her for a week and a half. Two days later her body was found in the river." Working with the meaning of Christa and the Unnamed Woman unlocked something deep inside this man who had denied that there

was any problem with sexism anymore. His sister became the crucified one, the brutalized one. Finally he was able to weep and to remember.

16

His story and the others I have described leave me convinced that persons who genuinely permit themselves to be confronted by the Christa are in some way transformed. Not only is our experience of Christ enlarged, but we are given different lenses through which to see ourselves in relation to Christ. We see our own inner and outer worlds as we never have before.



Thanks much! Good Friday will never
be the same.

INHOUSE

It is an honor for CWR to announce the beginning of THE WOMEN OF THE DECADE LECTURE SERIES in memory of Marjorie Casebier McCoy. The first lecture will be given on the evening of April 16, 1986, by Dr. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, a biblical scholar and feminist theologian from Tübingen, Germany. Her topic will be "New Dimensions in Mutuality".

Each year, CWR will invite an outstanding lecturer for this series as a way of honoring and remembering our good friend, Marjorie Casebier McCoy, who died last February from a brain tumor. Dr. Charles McCoy, who made the lecture series possible through a matching grant to CWR, felt that something which was people-oriented would be a fitting tribute to Marjorie. What better than a celebration which honors the Women of the Decade, the women who have been central in CWR's history, and which also brings people together to hear an outstanding lecture in the area of women and religion.

CWR will be raising funds to add to the initial gift from Charles McCoy in order to assure the permanence of the lecture series. Designated gifts to this fund, in memory of Marjorie, would be deeply appreciated.

As a way to mobilize our fundraising efforts, Carole Etzler, feminist singer and songwriter, held a concert at the GTU on the evening of November 22, 1985. Carole celebrated the launching of her third album, "Thirteen Ships". Her previous albums are "Sometimes I Wish" and "Womanriver". Longtime friend of CWR, Carole wrote our Women of the Decade song, "Standing Before Us",

which is on her new album and which was a highlight of the concert. CWR invited as special guests to the concert the women who were honored as our Women of the Decade at our 10th anniversary celebration, as well as the five women whom CWR sponsored to go to the "United Nations Decade of Women" NGO meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. The latter women were: Anne Brotherton, Mary Ellen Gaylord, Chris Smith, Ida Thornton, and Sandee Yarlott. Their commissioning was at the Women of the Decade luncheon last spring and included the singing of Carole's song.

We would like to invite all of our Journal readers and friends to be present for the Marjorie McCoy Women of the Decade Lecture Series with Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's lecture on April 16.

To conclude, as a tribute to Marjorie McCoy, we share the chorus of "Standing Before Us":

Standing before us, making us strong,
Lending her wisdom to help us along.
Sharing a vision, sharing a dream,
Touching our thoughts, touching our lives
Like a deep-flowing stream.

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by Karen Mattern

This Autumn CWR will coordinate the creation of a quilt celebrating feminist images of God. The Quilt is a traditional women's art form. In the midst of the hardship of their lives, our foremothers created their own sources of Beauty in a utilitarian form. From bits and pieces of fabric left over from the making and the wearing-out of clothing, they created kinetic masterpieces of visual art. The intricate quilted patterns by which the layers of the quilts were stitched together lent yet another dimension of design, depth and touch to these works of textile art. Often the fabric scraps used in the making of a quilt served in after-years to kindle memories and spark the imagination: pieces from old dresses and shirts recollected the events and stages of their own lives and those of their family members and friends. Favorite symbols were appliqued over and over again: the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley, King David's Crown, and other religious subjects were popular in the 1800's. In response to the power of the Christa and because of our own growth in feminist consciousness, CWR wants to create an appliqued quilt celebrating our feminist images of God. We will gather bits and pieces from our lives and create symbols that will spark the flight of our imaginations and kindle our memories of Her.

Our quilt will be suitable for wall-hanging, so that its images may be shared, and it will be either auctioned or raffled as part of CWR's fundraising effort to purchase Christa.



— looking at Christa I feel the same as when I return home after an absence.

Christa is a sculpture piece I can relate to — she represents the oppressed & devoured women of our jails & prisons, any woman forgotten, hidden, abused or thrown away. She can be the suffering woman in all of us.

Contributors

Edwina Hunter, Editor, is Associate Professor of Preaching at Pacific School of Religion and is on the doctoral faculty of the Graduate Theological Union. She is an ordained American Baptist minister and former pastor.

Mary Cross, Director of Center for Women and Religion, is a doctoral student at the Wright Institute in organizational psychology.

Jo Milgrom is Visiting Assistant Professor in Theology and the Arts at the Center for Judaic Studies of the Graduate Theological Union.

Dennis J. Steik, S.M. is a Roman Catholic priest, a member of the Marist Community in Berkeley, and a Doctor of Ministry student at Pacific School of Religion. He serves as Chaplain for three Roman Catholic seminaries in the Graduate Theological Union.

Anne Dilenschneider is a middler at Pacific School of Religion and a member of the Steering Committee and the Board of CWR.

Gloria Smallwood is Pastor of the Allen Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church in San Francisco and teaches in Oakland public schools. She is Adjunct Professor of Preaching at Pacific School of Religion. (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley; Master of Divinity, PSR)

Elizabeth Morris is on the Steering Committee for CWR and is completing courses at PSR for a Master of Divinity degree from Andover Newton Theological School.

Samuel G. Broude is Rabbi at Temple Sinai in Oakland.

Sandra Winter Park has served as Associate Director of CWR for five and a half years. She has recently accepted a call to be Assistant Pastor at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley.

Other Contributors

Photographs: Jo Milgrom, Susan Cole, Janet Cromwell, Sandy Park

Personal Responses (on viewing the Christa) written in the visitors' book at the Badé Museum and letter from Wendy Jo Snyder.

Students in the Doctor of Ministry program at San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Special Appreciation

Melanie Nielsen, Assistant to the Editor and typist extraordinaire! Melanie is a middler at Pacific School of Religion and is Newsletter Editor at CWR.

I wish I had done it! Inspired!
- I liked it! a very powerful statement!

The Christa's nudity makes me feel really uncomfortable. Jesus had a loincloth. Couldn't the Christa, at least, be similarly minimally clothed - A reminder of too many naked, exploited images of the feminine in our culture. White - the body. Could the Christa have been a big woman, rather than a small one? I like the idea of the sculptor more than the realization of it.

I would like Christa as a "new symbol," not a copy of a male image. I don't respond to it artistically either.

No crucifixion is beautiful or pleasant, she looks like she's in the final arch of death like Sisyphus at the point of watching the boulder roll back down. Our human condition is like this - we come to ourselves caught between giving up and going on, allowing something beyond ourselves entrance. In my church women has been subjugated, we await the resurrection of the feminine within us to carry us through. The spirit of resurrection is here.

